Dancing as Making

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At a recent conference on education, Sir Ken Robinson said, "There isn't an educational system on the planet that teaches dance every day to children the way we teach them mathematics. Why? Why not? I think this is rather important. I think that math is very important, but so is dance."[2] I think it likely that Robinson was referring to public education, yet his point is inarguable. Clearly our culture under-appreciates and often simply devalues dancing. It would be difficult to find anyone who would insist that we should spend money and time teaching dancing on a par with science and math, or even social studies and literature, or even art and music. Where does dance fit in a world directed by the masculine power of production? The answer is simple: dance is valued to the degree it is seen as productive. Yet, what does dancing produce? In the most immediate sense, dancing produces nothing beyond the bodies of the dancers dancing. One certainly could argue that there is some existence of a dance beyond the dancing, say the classical ballet "Sleeping Beauty." Hasn't it existed as some sort of entity for a long time? It was choreographed by Marius Pitipa and first performed in 1890. It is still frequently performed. Dance as artifact may apply in some sense for choreographed art performance dancing, but not for all the rest of the world's dancing. And for all dancing there is no parallel artifact like a play script for theatre or a musical score. Dance notation is not viable since it is difficult to read[3] and it produces no kinesthetic images.

While I strongly feel that dancing makes no thing, I still want to consider dancing as making. First I want to reflect a bit on this whole process of making especially as presented by Elaine Scarry in her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. I am surprised at how deeply making and unmaking are related to the human body and how long this relationship has been acknowledged. It is fascinating to think about how all making is, in some important sense, motivated by some lack of the body and amounts to a projection of the body into the world beyond the body.[4] And thus the motivation, the agency, for making rests in part on the pain or discomfort associated with this lack. We make things to alleviate a deficiency. It is a crazy insight to recognize that all made things are, in some sense, patterned on the body or at least our idea of what a body should be. It is important that we realize that in making stuff, we are remaking ourselves. I find insightful Scarry's discussion of the hinge effect of made things. We make things as projections from our bodies or our image of what our bodies should be. These made things, standing seemingly independent of us in the world outside our bodies, then return the favor, exercising an agency projected on them to remake us. The energy and effort

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[2] http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html See also http://www.sirkenrobinson.com/

[3] Dance notation systems are comprehensible only to the extensively trained and then cannot be "read" in anything like real time.

[4] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 284-88.

required to make a thing is multiplied in its impact on us and those around us as it hinges back to show us what we did. Scarry's analysis of the potential impact of the small effort and movement required to pull the trigger of a gun is far out of proportion to the impact the fired gun may have on the world. Of course, to make a gun from the inception of the idea of such a device through a history of development and design and manufacture and distribution is a long and complex one, yet we can see that in making there is often a powerful multiplication of the hinged return.

Dancing as art, as performance, as done for an audience, as a product of culture, of high culture seems to make something in the sense of most makings. Even so, such forms of dancing are usually uncomfortable products of masculine makings (even if not done by male dancers). Notice the terminology that has come to be associated with these accepted forms of dance. They are done by "companies" of dancers. The company puts on "productions." These days choreographers typically refer to their creative process as "making work." The results of choreography are themselves referred to as "works." The economic side of this type of dancing is prominent. Audiences pay to watch. Programs tell audiences the meanings and stories of the dances and the qualifications of the artists. Advertising and promotion are extensive. And so on. Importantly the dancing that is most embraced by our culture is a business enterprise whose business is to produce dances. Even with all these terminological adjustments and masculinizations to fit a world driven by productivity, dancing remains an uncomfortable fit. Few dance companies really make it; few dancers actually earn a living. And, notably, dancing, even of this type, is only rarely associated with masculinity and masculine sexuality. Baryshnikov is a rare exception.

Are there ways of appreciating in a richer sense even these dancings as makings? And then what of all the other types of dancings that exist throughout the world where there is no abiding product?

Dancing is distinctive for its relationship to making. It is a making where what is made is bodily identical with the maker. In some important respects the dancer is the dance. In dance making where is the hinge that Scarry describes? Where is the multiplier effect, especially for non-art non-performance dancing? The dancing body is at once self and other! In dancing the dancer makes an other, yet this other is the same body as that of the dancer. There is no physical separation. The dancer experiences this other in the same way as the dancer experiences her own body, her own self. This is quite remarkable, certainly provocative. We need consider other ideas and perspectives to understand the nuances and power of this aspect of dancing as a kind of making.

Most human experiences and actions can be considered in terms of one or more of the human senses being dominant. Reading involves primarily the visual sense. Writing adds something of the tactile. Eating engages taste predominantly, but also smell and even vision. Dancing is of the body and is sensual and engages feeling, yet what are the senses dancing engages? Dancers perhaps see themselves, but only from the rather odd angle of peering down at their bodies and even mirror images are strangely distorted and limited. Dancers smell their often sweaty bodies and those of other dancers, but how can smell be "the dance sense?" Hearing is important since dancers dance to music, to rhythms. Yet, postmodern dance demonstrated that dancing can be done in silence without anyone questioning that it is still dancing. Touch is important in some ways—the contact of the foot and

sometimes other body parts, with the floor and perhaps other dancing bodies or objects. Yet, clearly this isn't distinctive of dancing. Taste doesn't seem to be much involved in dancing. There is another sense; one commonly overlooked.

Proprioception is sometimes identified as the kinesthetic sense, another sense or one that significantly extends the sense of touch. Technically proprioception is a neurological phenomenon. Proprioception is based in sensory receptors associated with joints and muscles that sense and provide feedback to the demands placed on joints and muscles both from without and within. Dancing is heavily dependent on knowing where one's body parts are and on being able to move one's body in intended ways. Proprioception clearly is inseparable from movement. Proprioception then seems a strong candidate for the dancing sense.

In his book, *Parables for the Virtual,*[5] Brian Massumi writes that "the spatiality of the body without an image can be understood even more immediately as an effect of *proprioception*, defined as the sensibility proper to the muscles and ligaments as opposed to tactile sensibility … and visceral sensibility …."[6] In what is to me a brilliant discussion of proprioception, Massumi gives us much to appreciate and contemplate. He differentiates layers of the gross bodied senses. Touch, the tactile sense, in the limited sense of exteroceptors in the skin, perceives subject and object in that they mediate between feeling outside and inside. The visceral sense, that feeling in the gut—that feeling response of fright, for example—is the deepest layer of perception. Interestingly, as Massumi points out, visceral perception precedes the exteroceptive sense perception surely because it involves different areas of the brain and anticipates the translation into explanation of sight or sound or touch perception. Visceral perception registers intensity. Viscerality is a rupture in the stimulus response path; it is the perception of suspense; it is the space of passion.[7]

On proprioception, Massumi writes:

> Proprioception folds tactility into the body, enveloping the skin's contact with the external world in a dimension of medium depth: between epidermis and viscera. The muscles and ligaments register as conditions of movement what the skin internalizes as qualities: … Proprioception translates the exertions and ease of the body's encounters with objects into a muscular memory of relationality. This is the cumulative memory of skill, habit, posture. At the same time as proprioception folds tactility in, it draws out the subject's reactions to the qualities of the objects it perceives through all five senses, bringing them into the motor realm of externalizable response.

Continuing, Massumi writes:

> Proprioception effects a double translation of the subject and the object into the body, at a medium depth where the body is only body, having nothing of the putative profundity of the

[5] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
[6] Ibid., p. 58.
[7] Ibid., p. 61.

> self nor of the superficiality of external encounter. This subjective and nonobjective medium depth is one of the strata proper to the corporeal; it is a dimension of the *flesh*. … Proprioceptive memory is where the infolded limits of the body meet the mind's externalized responses and where both rejoin the quasi corporeal and the event. As infolding, the faculty of proprioception operates as a corporeal transformer of tactility into quasi corporeality. It is to the skin what movement-vision is to the eyes.[8]

Joining visceral perception and proprioception Massumi calls this conjunction "mesoperception," which he describes as

> The synthetic sensibility: it is the medium where inputs from all five senses meet, across subsensate excitations, and become flesh together, tense and quivering. Mesoperceptive flesh functions as a corporeal transformer where one sense shades into another over the failure of each, their input translated into movement and affect. Mesoperception can be called sensation, for short.[9]

This discussion of proprioception reveals that it is a complex of ideas with far-reaching implications. To summarize and digest a bit, some things can, I believe, be said.

- Proprioception translates sensations on the skin, conditions of movement, as qualities
- Inversely proprioception translates qualities held in memory into patterns of movement
- Through movement proprioception translates into relationships the way the body encounters objects
- Relationalities are proprioceptively recorded as posture, habit, skill, body schemas, sensorimotor patterns
- Proprioception translates qualities between memory and sensorimotor responses as expressions

The issue of self and other underlies all in this discussion. An important insight is that mesoperception—which is experienced as sensation, that is, as a feeling kind of knowing, awareness, consciousness—translates between self and other and does so in both directions. External stimulations are connected with relationalities, qualities, and values. Internal values engender sensorimotor patterns, movement. Proprioception is inseparable from our sense of self, fundamental relationality, subjective-objective interplay, consciousness, and body ownership.

Dancing then as making is the making through movement of an other, a corporeal other, an other whose body is coincident with the body of the maker, the dancer. The dancer then experiences this other not as object, but rather as subject, proprioceptively. The dancer feels the other in exactly the same way the dancer feels and knows herself. The other is not known even by touch which translates the objective to the subjective. Rather the other is known in movement; experienced as posture, habit, skill, body schemas, and sensorimotor patterns. In dancing, the other is mesoperceived. How remarkable.

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[8] Ibid., p. 59.
[9] Ibid., p. 62.

Proprioception then is the prominent sense involved with dancing in that most simple and direct sense that proprioception is the sense that provides us an awareness of the position and location of the parts of our bodies and is the basis on which directed and controlled movement is possible. Furthermore, when considered in terms both grounded in and transcending corporeality, proprioception is fundamental to all of the senses and all of our actions. Proprioception is body and movement, but it is movement in process, movement-as-such, flesh in its reversibility,[10] perception in its play, self in its otherness. Proprioception as incorporeal materialism is seduction,[11] play, structurality.

Dancing is, in the most basic sense, movement, yet not any movement is dancing. Might we not suggest that what distinguishes dancing is that it enacts just these qualities of mesoperception; it plays out change. It is not about anything; it does not mean anything; it is a display in corporeal moving terms, of that which cannot be captured as a point in space and time or even a trajectory. Dancing is an exercise in and celebration of self-othering or other-selfing that enacts without production or application our proprioceptive awareness, our becoming-in-being, and our interplay with the world through movement.[12]

Dancing means nothing? I am certain this statement is a shock to many; some will find it repulsive. Clearly at first glance it appears antithetical to my deep respect for dancing. Yet, what I am attempting to provide some glimpse of is the dancing as dancing part of dances. Certainly specific dances can have meaning; can be deeply meaningful, of course. But what I am after is that dancing that is not fully graspable because it cannot be arrested or captured without it being transformed into something else in the process. I am trying to glimpse the dancing before there can be any meaning connected with it or expressed by it. Here dancing is at once so ephemeral that we cannot grasp it and also that which is most abiding among all the meanings and qualities that can be carried by it.

There is another perspective that we must pursue to understand some aspects of my observation that dancing is, in a certain sense, making without meaning. This perspective may help us understand that dancing, at the place we seek it, in being meaningless is actually stronger than making meaning. Here is where I must introduce Jean Baudrillard's idea of seduction.

I will be discussing dancing as seduction in more detail in an essay focused on Latin American bolero dancing; here I want to focus primarily on Baudrillard's illumination of aspects of what he understood as seduction by contrasting it with production. Indeed, Baudrillard's motivation for his reflections on seduction is largely as a response to seduction being covered over by the dedication to nature and production that has increasingly characterized our culture from the nineteenth century to the present. Seduction was always, from a religious point of view, "the strategy of the devil, whether in the guise of witchcraft or love."[13] Seduction is "the very artifice of the world. … maintained in psychoanalysis and in

[10] A phrase that anticipates my discussion of Merleau-Ponty.
[11] A term that anticipates my discussion of Baudrillard.
[12] At some point I must expand this to consider the function of mirror neurons in dancing, which surely has something to do with audience experience.
[13] Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 1.

the 'liberation of desire.'"[14] Baudrillard believes the current world "can no longer be interpreted in terms of structures and diacritical oppositions,"[15] rather, he argues, it must now be "interpreted in the terms of play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances—that is, the terms of seduction."[16] For Baudrillard, seduction has to do with artifice, with symbol, with appearances or perhaps more to the point seduction has to do with the qualities and movement that are engaged in artifice and appearance. It is an oscillatory process of play wherein things are not what they appear to be, but then it is in this strategy that they reveal. Seduction involves a reversibility, by which we glimpse that interplay between appearance and its referent. Baudrillard takes this understanding of appearance to an extent beyond the old concern with distinguishing appearance and reality into a world, our present world, where such a determination is no longer possible, if ever it was. Seduction then is the pure play of signs; a strategy of appearances.

Baudrillard's discussion of seduction is relevant to our consideration of dancing as making. Contemporary western societies have increasingly focused on making in the sense of production, making things and making things that make things. Production is power. Dancing is a kind of making, but it must resist and deny the most fundamental qualities of makings in the terms of the masculine power of production that characterizes our culture. How else are we to understand dancing as making?

Baudrillard contrasts production with seduction. Bardrillard identifies production as a masculine power. Power, however, can exist, can seduce, only if challenged, only if placed in a relationship of reversibility[17] with that which is not powerful, that which makes no thing, that which means nothing, but is that on which power ultimately depends. Baudrillard identifies seduction as the inverse of production, the inverse of power. It has "no power of its own, only that of annulling the power of production. But it always annuls the later."[18] Seduction is "femininity that incarnates reversibility, the possibility of play and symbolic involvement."[19] Seduction precedes production and characterizes the primal structurality that gives rise to power, the power to produce, to mean. In this sense, Baudrillard understands that

> Seduction is stronger than power because it is reversible and mortal, while power, like value, seeks to be irreversible, cumulative and immortal. Power partakes of all the illusions of production, and of the real; it wants to be real, and so tends to become its own imaginary, its own superstition (with the help of theories that analyze it, be they to contest it). Seduction, on the other hand, is not of the order of the real—and is never of the order of force, nor relations of force. But precisely for this reason, it enmeshes all power's *real* actions, as well as the entire

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 7. concerns shared by Merleau-Ponty whose work I will discuss below and Derrida and many others,
[16] Ibid.
[17] Below I discuss the importance of an incomplete reversibility. This pertains here as well because seduction always annuls production.
[18] Ibid., p. 15.
[19] Ibid., p. 21.

> reality of production, in this unremitting reversibility and disaccumulation—*without which there would be neither power nor accumulation*.[20]

Might we enrich our understanding of dancing as making in terms of seduction? When dancing is aligned with seduction as Baudrillard presents it, it is not productive, nor does it have fixed meanings. It would not project something onto made objects to meet the desire caused by a lack. Dancing is reversible and circular and mortal and powerless and without meaning. What could be more exemplary of the reversibility that is seduction than dancing where the same object, the body, is maker and thing made, is at once dance and dancer. Yet, dancing as seduction is stronger than production, stronger for not having meaning, for not making anything, for not producing artifact. Dancing is foundational in important ways to production and to meaning. Dancing is perhaps the last surviving experience of the idea of reality in a world of hyperreality. Remember that I am considering dancing as that which precedes and underlies and makes possible the making of all dances.

To appreciate dancing as making is further illuminated by a number of insightful perspectives. Another to be introduced here is based on the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose life-long work on perception inspires a number of important and promising insights when directed towards our efforts at understanding dancing.

Philosophers, particularly phenomenologists, are interested in perception. More recently cognitive science has entered the area. So also has critical theory, that weirdly postmodern philosophical multi-disciplinary discourse. Why so much attention to perception? It has arisen as the camera obscura model of perception has been set aside. In this view, perception was seen as operating like the black box camera. The outside world enters the body through the sense organs which, acting like simple lenses, project the world outside onto a screen inside our brains and does so rather objectively. Once this old model is set aside, the study of perception invites consideration of the deepest, most complex, most profound, most elusive, most fascinating questions and ideas related to what it means to be human. The visible and the invisible, mind and body, self and other, nature and nurture, masculine and feminine, production and seduction, agency and free will, movement and cognition, consciousness and self, and just about every dual choice we can imagine are now brought into new discourse. No longer are we struggling to settle the score and announce the final results, the side of the duality that wins. We now must try to comprehend and give imagery to complicated dynamic systems, structuralities, play, “body without organs,” “body without images,” flesh and mucous, chiasm—images that project us beyond the simple substances and patterns into a contemplation of dimensions that transcend the easily graspable yet fuel and motor the concretions of our existence. Every scientific advance has philosophical implications. Every philosophical idea suggests new scientific inquiries. We must look anew at the complex interactivity of sense organs and brain processing. Synaesthesia, the intertwining of the senses, is now more important and interesting than is the study of senses isolated from one another. And forgotten or overlooked or unknown senses such as proprioceptors and visceral perception are suddenly playing central roles.

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[20] Ibid., p. 46.

Movement, which played no part at all in the camera obscura approach to the senses, has become important, even fundamental, to every arena in the study of perception. Movement is synonymous with the dynamic character of the present interests. While these various perspectives, various research approaches, remain separable, containable, they overlap profoundly. Here too we experience a jolt. No longer is it responsible to maintain isolation in the pursuit of one's interests; it is incumbent on us all to benefit from the overlap.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's lifelong study was accompanied by a progressive shift in his understanding of perception and its implications for being human. Late in his life Merleau-Ponty had come to a new stage in his understanding, provocatively presented in his acclaimed essay "The Intertwining—the Chiasm." The following key passage from that essay tracks this shift.

> We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only "shadows stuffed with organs," that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not "in" my body, and my body is not "in" the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. … there is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.[21]

Focusing on vision we get another sense of his understanding in the following passage:

> Between the alleged colors and visible, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh of* things.[22]

Notable is Merleau-Ponty's use of the words "tissue" and "flesh." Flesh refers literally to the soft tissue that is muscle and fat that cover the bones; that flesh is subcutaneous. However, the word also means the outer surface of the human body. Thus flesh also refers to the outside of the body, the skin surface. We have in this idea of flesh then an intimacy of two things—outside and inside—that are side by side, yet the single term flesh which may refer to either inside or outside joins these two separate things as two sides of a single thing. Furthermore Merleau-Ponty jolts us by insisting that this nourishing sustaining tissue is not a thing at all, but a possibility and a latency, which he then also terms *flesh*. Flesh, while physical, is a way of grasping a relationality, a structurality, or as he puts it a possibility and a latency. This intertwining is referred to as flesh, but also as chiasm which designates a crossing place.

As flesh literally indicates the interdependence and intimacy of inside and outside—in former discussions, between exteroceptors and interoceptors; subjectivity and objectivity; touch and feeling or emotion; and so on—Merleau-Ponty goes on to project, by analogy, the same relationship between the body and the world, a relationship which he also sees as one of flesh and thus there must be "the flesh of the world." By this point it is clear that Merleau-Ponty is no longer talking simply about perception,

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[21] Ibid., p. 138.
[22] Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 132-33.

he is also talking about what it means to be human in a profound and startling way. The depth and gravity of his idea is clear when he identifies his idea flesh as "an 'element' of Being,"[23] "an ultimate notion,"[24] "the ultimate truth."[25]

Flesh is further fleshed out by Merleau-Ponty in terms of "hinge," "fold," "reversibility," "turned inside out," as well as "dehiscence," "intertwining," and "chiasm." While vision dominates as the exemplar, touch actually underlies all vision examples. One would think that touch insinuates itself more and more as Merleau-Ponty moves progressively from the camera obscura model of the senses into his exploration of the idea of flesh. Touch progressively replaces vision as exemplary.

How do we perceive depth? This is a basic problem that must be considered by anyone studying the senses. In this new world of flesh, this problem offers an important opportunity to further develop imagery that allows us to understand a bit more fully and concretely. Depth then and particularly the concept "pure depth" that accompanies and arises in the discussion of depth also offers an important opportunity to gain greater insight into our inquiries of dancing.

The concept "pure depth" is discussed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others and it greatly fascinates me. I'm going to give something of an overview of these discussions and how "pure depth" contributes to our understanding of not only Merleau-Ponty's *flesh*, but also to our understanding of ourselves as percipient-perceptibles, as he identified us. In the context of this discussion I am going to consider dancing as a candidate for being a powerful exemplar of "pure depth." Turning that around, I will then consider the implications for understanding dancing more deeply when considered as "pure depth."

To avoid the implications of a split dual structure to reality Merleau-Ponty must introduce unity and continuity among the separate parts. Inseparability among its constituents would simply collapse reality. Somehow there must be distinctive constituents of reality yet they must not exist only as separate from one another. Merleau-Ponty's consideration of this thorny matter focuses on the arena of human perception. This makes sense given that it is through perception that we come to know the world beyond our own bodies. Perception is the fabric of our connection, the hedge against isolation. He creates a unified ontology by showing that embodiment unifies subject and object, thus overcoming the common subject-object dualism. However, to avoid the collapse of all distinction he had also to somehow accommodate separateness, that is, distance and this led to his ontology of perception, to flesh.

Distance is key however distance must be understood relationally and this suggests "depth." The concern with how we perceive depth is an old one, usually understood as "a line endwise to the eye,"[26] and was thought as derivatively perceived, added to an otherwise flat and static image produced by a two-dimensional array of radiant energy on the retinal surface. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and James

[23] Ibid., p. 139.
[24] Ibid., p. 140.
[25] Ibid., p. 155.
[26] From George Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision* cited in Sue L. Cataldi, *Emotion, Depth, and Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space* (State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 30.

Gibson (among others) have rejected the classical explanation. Notably, Merleau-Ponty's ways of resolving the issue of distance and depth then become fundamental to his flesh ontology. Depth comes to be understood as that which both allows difference and distinctness while creating a bond or connection or identity between perceiver and perceived. The exploration of depth is complex and profound.

James Gibson's approach[27] is environmental. For Gibson distance is an intrinsically dynamic concept that requires movement. We don't actually see depth but rather we see one thing behind another. Movement reveals the occluding edges of objects that are separated and connected along the dimension of depth. Gibson formulates depth in terms of paradox, a "unity through disparity." The environmental aspect of his approach is articulated in *affordance,* as he termed it. Affordance is the value and meaning of things in the environment and value and meaning are always understood in terms of the relationship to the perceiver. Thus depth is the dimension that points both to the object and to the perceiving subject. Depth is the significance of surfaces in relation to the body.[28]

Merleau-Ponty held that an essential aspect of every meaningful perception is a spatial orientation. It is always already there because it must be presupposed in the body holding some place in the world as the locale for perception. This is then a primordial spatial orientation. Perhaps we might enhance our understanding of Merleau-Ponty's idea here in terms of proprioception, the ability already active at birth (and surely before)[29] of the body to locate itself and its parts in space through movement. From birth the body simply exists and orients itself in space already existing. Merleau-Ponty holds that we come into the world as perceptible bodily beings; we belong to the flesh of the world. The body is already oriented by being a body.

The body however has in its structure and behavior examples of distance and separation that are also unities. One hand touching the other hand is a favored example often contemplated by Merleau-Ponty. Another example is stereopsis, seeing a single image yet with two eyes. We, in fact, see the singular world clearly, under normal circumstances, through two eyes that "see" separate images. We can test this easily by closing first one eye then the other in a variety of situations. Difference, separation, is easily confirmed. Yet, so also is the unity of the visual image. Even vision situations in which there is a distinct disparity between the images separately seen by our two eyes get reconciled; they "snap" into place as a unified image that is nearly impossible to then willfully separate. This separation yet unity is fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's consideration of depth.

Depth at this naïve level then is understood as that dimension by which we see something from "here" that is at its place "there." The "here" and "there" are contemporary in our experience. Here and there are joined in time through their visibility and this is "depth," a space of "copresent implication." When movement is factored in, as necessary to such perception, then, very much in the same terms as Gibson's affordances, Merleau-Ponty appreciates depth as a "sensitive space," as "living movement," as

[27] James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986).
[28] See Cataldi, pp. 31-34.
[29] See Shaun Gallagher's presentation of neonate imitation, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005). pp. 69-73.

"lived distance."[30] Depth, in this progressive consideration, becomes increasingly profound. It is that dimension that contemporaneously unites and separates. It is "a thick view of time." Depth is the "most existential dimension."[31]

Depth, we might call it more properly "pure depth," when taken in this most profound sense, is a dimension that is primordial, allowing the perception of distance and the value of the distant. Primordial depth, in itself, does not yet operate between objects, between perceiver and percipient. "Pure depth" is depth without distance from here.[32] In its thickness, depth preceding perception is perhaps difficult to grasp. Merleau-Ponty offers an analogy that both depends on vision and also foils vision to the point of replacing it with touch, with feeling. This lever is "dark space," the experience of night or darkness. In darkness seeing is thwarted, yet seeing into the darkness elicits a feeling of thickness, a density, a materiality, a tangibility, an intimacy. In dark space everything is obscure and mysterious. Eugene Minkowski, an early twentieth century psychiatrist, who offered the idea of "dark space," held that "the essence of dark space is mystery."[33] The experience of dark space provides a means of trying to grasp pure depth. Pure depth is depth without foreground or background, without surfaces and without any distances separating it from me. Menkowski understood dark space, which Merleau-Ponty identifies with "pure depth," as "the depth of our being," as "the true source of our life."[34]

Pure depth is key to understanding flesh which, like pure depth, as pure depth, is always already there as precessive, that is, "the formative medium of the subject and object" and as progenitive, the "inauguration of the where and when."[35] The moving body is fundamental to flesh, because through movement flesh begins to understand itself or become aware of itself.[36] Flesh, without the moving body, is only possibility, never actuality, percipience never perception. The moving body is then, as Merleau-Ponty termed it, a "percipient-perceptible," that is, an entity possessing the power to perceive while also being capable of being perceived. The body is an intertwining of two sides, the adherence of a self-sentient side to a sensible side. The body as an intertwining blurs the boundary between the flesh of the world (depth) and our own bodily flesh. The body exists then in an ambience, a primordial given, of depth, the hidden dimension behind everything.[37]

This doubling is for Merleau-Ponty a reversibility. Reversibility is a way to express the interconnection among distinctions. A subject requires an object and vice versa; they are reversible; they oscillate back and forth among themselves. Movement is essential for reversibility to be realized, for occlusion to be recognizable, for perception to take place. Yet, this reversibility is never complete. This is a fascinating

[30] Erwin Straus clarifies, "Distance is a primal phenomenon … there is no distance without a sensing and mobile subject; there is no sentience without distance." Quoted from his *The Primary World of Senses* in Cataldi, p. 45.
[31] Cataldi, p. 45.
[32] Ibid., p. 48.
[33] Eugene Minkowski, *Lived Time*, (1933), p. 429, cited in Cataldi, p. 49.
[34] Cataldi quoting Minkowski, p. 50.
[35] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 140, quoted in Cataldi, p. 60.
[36] Cataldi, p. 61.
[37] Ibid., p. 67.

phase in this argument, I think. Complete reversibility would result in identity among the distinctions and a collapse of perception. Were the touching of one hand with the other to be completely reversible it would not be possible to distinguish one hand from the other. The images provided by each eye would be the same and there would be no negotiation and reconciliation between the two, no vision. The term "chiasm" here identifies this gap or cross-over space. There must remain this undetectable, in itself, space or gap or hiddenness for reversibility to be incomplete. Incomplete reversibility is not some flaw to be overcome in perception, it is rather the very motor that drives the movement of reversibility that allows for simultaneous interdependence and distance. Since the chiasm is hidden, since chiasm precedes and makes possible reversibility, it can be thought of as "depth" or better as "pure depth" as presented through the analogy of "dark space." Chiasm, pure depth, this incompleteness is the source or condition of percipience and at the same time unifies flesh ontology.

I am well aware that these ideas are difficult to grasp and tend to slip from our grasp even as we lightly touch them, yet these ideas, and I believe even our way of trying to think about them, are fundamental to our understanding of ourselves as sentient beings. Keeping these ideas in mind, I want to turn now to dancing. In my consideration of dancing in these terms I want to both show how dancing may help us understand flesh ontology and also how flesh ontology may help us understand dancing in new and important ways.

I want to return to my earlier discussion of dancing as a distinctive kind of making. Dancing is distinguished by the relationship between the maker and the thing made. The dancer, in dancing, makes the dance. The dance is inseparable, physically inseparable from the body of the dancer, from the body of the maker of the dance. Even in the situations where a choreographer makes up a dance that is set on the bodies of others, there is no manifest dance or work other than when bodied, when danced. The existence of any dance is in it being danced and a dance cannot be danced apart from a dancing body. The distinction between the dancer and the dance is not difficult to discern, it is not ambiguous, and it is an aspect of the very designation of dancing. So the dance is other than the dancer, while being identical with the dancer. This description of dancing surely sounds familiar having just worked through Merleau-Ponty's discussion of perception and the body in terms of his flesh ontology. It is similar, in some senses, to the examples of two hands touching or of two eyes seeing, yet the dancing body presents a fascinating new wrinkle: there is no physical separation between the two parts, dance and dancer, these are identical bodies. It is in the movement called "dancing" that the body is at once separated into dance and dancer, self and other in some respects, a distance that allows reversibility, while at once holding self and other, dance and dancer, as unified, indeed as bodies identical.

Yet, how is this possible? Here is where "pure depth" becomes important. There is an important distinction between the quotidian moving body and the dancing body. Following Merleau-Ponty we would expect that "pure depth" exists in the perceptual space in which the body locates itself. However, in the dancing body "pure depth" must be otherwise located. The reversibility in dancing, unlike that of perception, does not take place between the perceiver and percipient, joined in the flesh of the world. Rather reversibility in dancing takes place in the body of the dancer, in the action of dancing, since in dancing self and other are distinguished while having identical bodies, the dancing

body. The question then is where in dancing is the primal depth that precedes and makes possible the reversibility? We must look for an alternative to "dark space," that vision initiated experience of trying to see in the dark only to be foiled and thus forced into that thickness that is felt rather than seen. We can look immediately into that perceptive depth within the body that we have come to understand we are born with, perhaps even conceived with since it surely is functioning neonatally, and that is interoception or proprioception. These are the receptors by which we understand ourselves as bodies moving in space. These are the receptors that provide a sense of self, that provide the ground for movement itself that thus must precede all exteroception**.** Proprioception can be described in terms identical with those that describe "dark space," that is, as primordial depth that constitutes a medium of thickness with a tangible diffuse materiality that is not held at a distance.

While proprioception provides the birth of "pure depth" in the sense that self necessitates a distinction, a distance from, other; proprioception alone is vague about the other, requiring the other to be nothing more than ambient space in which the body moves, in which the body is located. Dancing, however, is a making of an other and a concrete other, which is not set apart from the proprioceptively aware body; indeed this concrete other cannot exist apart. The dancing body is at once self and other, both proprioceptively, rather than exteroceptively, experienced. As the essence of "dark space" is mystery, so surely must we so identify the essence of dancing. Dancing is the primordial depth that allows one to experience other and otherness proprioceptively and emotionally as one's own body. Dancing creates depth without surfaces and without any distance separating other from me. Dancing is depth without foreground or background. The distance between self and other as experienced in the dancing body is pure depth, primordial depth, yet made manifest, made visible to others. Compared with "dark space" that foils vision and recoils to touch and feeling, dancing begins with that most intimate of feeling, with the thickness of feeling itself, in interoception and yet "shows" it in the observable act of dancing. Dancing is distinguished in the realm of movement in its identity with depth, with the mysterious thickness that allows the distance of self and other while holding them together in one body. Dancing is movement that is "pure depth" and thus precedes the movement upon which perception, or better exteroception, depends.

Dancing is a reversibility between dancer and dance, between self and other, yet it clearly is an incomplete reversibility. While "dancer" cannot be without "dancing" without making a "dance," there is the constant awareness that the dancing may stop at any moment and then the reversibility terminates. It is also clear that it is the dancer who will remain rather than the dance. The dance is ephemeral even as it is fully bodied. This hidden incompleteness is not the weakness of dancing, but rather the factor that energizes it, that gives it value albeit a mysterious one. In dancing there is always that hidden emptiness or space or chiasm that only movement can maintain. We experience the collapse of "pure depth" when a dance ends, so it is the sustaining of the chiasm or open place in the bodied moving action of dancing that is the ground for the possibilities for affordance, for bearing meanings, but much more significantly, for evoking feeling and emotion. These are topics I must consider more fully, but unfortunately at another time.

Dancing is that reversibility that is necessary and must precede the stage that Merleau-Ponty contemplates in his favorite example of one hand touching another. While he can see and feel that the hands are separate hands, he concludes that they are united in being of one body. Yet, it appears that he holds this only because he can *see* that the hands are connected to arms connected to a common trunk or because in the past he has made this connection and now knows this connection due to personal history. He does not acknowledge that we already know without seeing that our two hands are of one body because we propriocieve them before seeing them as two and distinct, yet of one body. We simply know proprioceptively that they both are *my* hands. While Merleau-Ponty understands the body as percipient-perceptible, it appears that this connection of the body to the world through flesh depends on the body being, more fundamentally, propriocepient-proprioceptable, for this is the primal and pure depth that is the embodied chiasm across which reversibility plays. We must know, in the sense of feeling in our bodies, the thickness or presence of pure depth, before we can even place ourselves in the space of perception.[38]

Dancing is the most fundamental dehiscence or breaking open that creates the hinge, or perhaps better termed the bootstrap, by which we come to play in that mobiatic wonderland of perception, signs, metaphor, art, language, ritual, and certainly everything else we might consider distinctively human. Dancing is the exercise and showing of "pure depth," if it is not the actual action in which our existence is constituted.

There are plenty of examples that may help us see that, while Western cultures tend to diminish the significance of dancing or to value it only to the degree it is commodifiable, others have a different perspective.

The Hindu figure Nataraja, the lord of dancing, a form of Shiva, is significant. As depicted in the popular bronze images fashioned in the thirteenth century, Nataraja is dancing while holding in his hands symbols representing the five cosmic processes creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment, and release. His dancing is not a part of these cosmic processes, but the primordial grounding upon which all these cosmic processes become possible. His dancing is understood as *lila* or play and, as such, it is not done for any reason. Reason or meaning or affordance can occur only inside the cosmic processes. Nataraja dances simply because it is his own nature to do so. Without the fuller exploration that should be provided here, I would suggest that dancing was selected as the playful actions of Nataraja because the ancient Hindus comprehended that it shows and exemplifies the "pure depth" which in Merleau-Ponty's terms is what necessarily precedes and is the ground for perception, for his flesh ontology. Dancing precedes and grounds ontology.

Dancing then as "pure depth" is the platform or primal condition on which are built the many dance forms that do have intention that take a specific form. Ballet and Javanese court dancing are highly codified dance forms that hold and show the most fundamental values of a culture, in both these cases, the culture of the court. On the platform of "pure depth" these dances create something like "pure ideals" for behavior, demeanor, comportment, presence, value, and so on. The "other" presented as

[38] This is what those newborn infants are doing in facial imitation.

the dance is no real other, but an ideal other, yet, in its dancing it is realized in real bodies in real movement in real presence. In dancing the ideal body of the dance is reversible with the quotidian body of the dancer, yet the reversibility is incomplete. The incompleteness is the depth that makes it possible for the dancer and those witnessing the dancing to actually experience the ideal.

It is of interest that children the world over dance before they speak. Kids respond to the rhythms of their environment not with quotidian or purposive or meaningful actions, but rather with that form of action that people everywhere identify as dancing. Surely this is the response in this critical stage of development of the dehiscence that exercises proprioceptively experienced pure depth, that exercises the pure joy of being human. And I believe, were we to study this carefully, children begin dancing at the stage in human development when the sense of self and the other is understood in the ways necessary to make possible the acquisition of language, metaphor, artifice, and art.

With these sorts of analyses we can appreciate why dancing is so commonly inseparable from religious and ritual acts. The embodiment of the "other" in dancing is an act of human transcendence and can be an act of theological immanence. Dancing can bridge the distance between human and other-than-human while allowing that distance to remain.

When Ken Robinson spoke of the importance of teaching dancing in public education, the reason he gave to justify doing so was: "we all have bodies … or did I miss something." And his audience laughed. Not to distract from his message, but to argue that because we all have bodies we should teach dancing to our children with the same urgency as we do math and science will convince no one. Unfortunately we simply have not had a sophisticated and complex understanding of dancing and its importance to human life. I have argued the importance of dancing in more detailed terms supported by an array of broadly accepted research representing several fields of study. The conclusion, which is at least more specific and developed than to state that that we should dance because we all have bodies, is that dancing is the most fundamental dehiscence or breaking open that creates the bootstrap with which we pull ourselves up to play in that mobiatic wonderland of perception, signs, metaphor, art, language, ritual, and certainly everything else we might consider human.

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